

# NEWSBYTES

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

## Iran’s largest warship boosts its Red Sea naval buildup

The Iranian navy’s largest warship *Makran*, a logistics vessel which carries 7 helicopters, and the missile carrier *Zereh* have been posted to its fleet in the northern Indian Ocean, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea, the Tasnim news agency reports. The two new warships were unveiled and delivered during a two-day Iranian exercise in the Gulf of Oman.

“We are once again in the Red Sea region,” said Maj. Gen. Mohammad Hossein Bagher reporting on the ongoing buildup of warships on Wednesday. State TV said the 121,000-metric ton *Makran* is Iran’s largest military ship at 228 meters (748 feet) long, 42 meters (138 feet) wide and 21.5 meters (70 feet) tall. It is claimed to support combat ships in the fleet, can travel for nearly three years without docking and carry information collection and processing gear. These features are not independently confirmed. Video footage released by the military showed helicopters carrying commandos to the *Makran* as part of the exercise.

*Newsweek* this week ran images of advanced Iranian Shahed-136 “suicide drones” deployed to Houthi-controlled northern Yemen. They are estimated to have an effective range of 2,000 to 2,200 km. Israel, Saudi Arabia and US bases are well within range.

Israel military sources say the IDF has identified the peril posed by Iran’s “second circle” of aggression in Yemen and Iraq. The IDF has been conducting war games since December simulating attacks from the south from a variety of hardware, whether by missiles, drones or other remote guidance weapons. Patriot and Iron Dome anti-missile batteries have been moved to its southernmost town, the Red Sea port city and resort of Eilat.

Its backing for the Yemeni Houthi insurgency has won Iran a strategic foothold against Israel and Saudi Arabia, over and above Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Its naval buildup puts Tehran in position to blockade this vital sea lane.

Iran routinely uses Yemen’s Houthis for cross-border missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia. Its current naval buildup will threaten the kingdom’s Red Sea coastline and western oil route as well. Iran’s use of its “second circle” of aggression against American allies in the region

is one more item for the incoming Joe Biden presidency to tackle in any renewed nuclear negotiations with the Islamic Republic.

## Time to Build Third Temple, Says Israeli Lawmaker

“Anyone who represents Israel cannot be disconnected from the Creator. We are all anticipating the Redemption”

December 30, 2020 | Israel Today Staff



Yet another Member of Knesset has expressed his desire not only for Jews to be able to freely visit and express their faith atop Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, but for the Third Temple to be build “in our days.”

Nissim Vaturi ranked 40th on the list of Likud candidates, which means he didn’t make it into the Knesset in the last national election. But, with several Likud MKs recently leaving the party ahead of the upcoming national election, Vaturi and several others are getting a chance

to serve as lawmakers, even if only for a few months.

As one of his first official acts after being sworn in, Vaturi headed for the Temple Mount. A religious Jewish resident of the Golan Heights, it was Vaturi’s first ever visit to Judaism’s holiest site.

While there, he told an organization that advocates for building the Third Temple that “anyone who represents Israel cannot be disconnected from the Creator. We are all anticipating the Redemption.” Vaturi then openly recited the traditional Jewish prayer stating, “May we merit redeeming this place for the *Shechina* (holy presence) to dwell, and to build the Holy Temple quickly and in our days.”

Jews are typically barred from praying atop the Temple Mount, but police officers present at the time did not prevent Vaturi from doing so.

### Gulf Arabs helping Israel build Temple?

Some Palestinians are accusing Israel’s new Gulf state allies of helping the Jewish state lay the groundwork for the Third Temple.

In an op-ed published over the weekend, Dr. Adnan Abu Amer, Dean of Political Science at the Umma Open University in Gaza, suggested that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) could use its newfound influence on the Temple Mount to help the Jews gain a foothold there. “This

raises the Palestinians' fear that the next stage might signal the start of building the alleged synagogue with the contribution of the UAE authorities," he continued.

Abu Amer noted that the UAE has no problem selling land to Jews, and that the Gulf state already hosts a synagogue, as well as a Hindu temple.

## Your Face Is Set To Replace Your Bank Card

**Sara Stewart strolls into a small Mexican restaurant in Los Angeles and orders a torta, a type of sandwich.**

To pay she simply looks at her reflection in a small LCD screen attached to the cashier's counter. Then to add her preferred amount of tip she flashes a quick peace sign at the monitor.

The entire process takes less than five seconds, and is entirely contactless. Moreover, Ms Stewart doesn't need to carry her mobile phone or bank card with her, or show any form of identification, or even enter a pin number.

Welcome to the futuristic world of facial recognition payment. It might sound like something from a science fiction movie, but this kind of transaction is already happening millions of times a day across China's major cities.

With the technology now being introduced in the US, and other countries such as Denmark and Nigeria, are we all going to be using it within a few years' time? And, are there data security and privacy issues that we should worry about?

Ms Stewart, an 18-year-old university student, says she has no such concerns. "I feel like technology is moving so fast that people don't even think twice about using something like this.



*Sara Stewart holds up a peace sign, which, as the system recognizes, means that she wants to pay a 15% tip*

"Our phones already read our faces, and our faces are already all over the internet, so I don't think it really makes much of a difference [to someone's security]. It's faster, more convenient, and safer... and you don't have to worry about leaving your phone or cards at

home."

She uses facial recognition payment, via a US tech start-up called PopID. You sign up via its website, by uploading a photograph of your face, which is stored on the firm's cloud-based system. You then link your account to your bank card.

In addition, you can choose to use PopID's hand gesture tipping tool. Ms Stewart has set this at thumbs up for 10%, the peace sign for 15%, and the shaka or "hang loose" sign for 20%.

PopID is based in Los Angeles, and is now used by about 70 independent restaurants and cafes across a handful of US cities, mainly on the West Coast.

The firm's chief executive John Miller says: "Our view is that using your face to pay is no different [than using your phone].

"It's just another way to identify yourself. The [digital] picture [taken at point of sale] is destroyed immediately, and the data isn't shared with anyone."

In fact, he argues that it's less intrusive than paying by your mobile phone, because a phone can track your location at all times via GPS. He adds that the photos stored by PopID are mathematical maps of unique facial vectors, not actual photographs.

Currently PopID requires the user to temporarily lower his or her facemask, but the firm says it is updating its systems so that this will not have to be done in the future.

Some 7,000 miles (12,000 km) away, in the Chinese city of Guangzhou, another student has facial payment technology on her mind. Ling (who did not wish to share her real name for fear of getting into trouble) says that it is now the only way to buy food from the vending machine in her accommodation block at Sun Yat-sen University.

Unlike Sara in Los Angeles, Ling is far from happy about the roll out of the technology. Concerned about its ever-increasing encroachment into her daily life, she is refusing to use it. Even if that means she cannot buy a late night snack.

"Tech is like a tide," she says. "There's no way you can swim against it. But I also want to make a stand of some kind, for as long as I'm able to do so."

If technology in general is indeed a tide, then the rollout of facial recognition payment technology in China is something of a tsunami.

Almost all (98%) of mobile payments in China goes through just two apps - Alipay (owned by ecommerce giant Alibaba) and WeChat Pay - and both are racing to install their facial recognition systems across the country.

Alipay is spending three billion yuan (\$420m; £300m) over three years, and according to Chinese state media, 760 million people will be using facial recognition payments by next year.

Wang Bing, from the Luoyang Vocational College of Science and Technology, in Henan Province, says the roll out has been fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic.

"The experience of Covid was huge in China in terms of bringing people into facial recognition systems," he says.

He adds that the software and camera systems are so advanced that they are impossible to trick, such as by stealing someone's photograph. The technology can also differentiate between identical twins. But will the technology take off in the rest of the world? Brett King, an expert on the future of banking and payment systems, believes it will - unless governments choose to stop it.

The author of a book called Banking 4.0, he says that the exact measurements and features of your face are actually more secure than your account passwords.

"Facial payment is part of the growing digital identity structure.... I appreciate the concerns about privacy, but the reality is that a [face-based] digital identity structure is inevitable for safety and security.

"[Digital] payments, transactions and services are becoming more and more imbedded in our life, and in our world, and that's definitely going to require biometrics, because passwords are simply not secure enough."

Mr King adds that many users of Apple phones are already happy to use facial recognition to access their handsets, and that the facial payment systems are just an extension of that.

However, he says US regulators may look at the technology. This comes at a time of increased concern about facial recognition systems in general.

A handful of Democrats in the US Congress want to try to reintroduce a bill this year to prevent the technology being used by federal agencies such as the FBI to identify crime suspects. And there are concerns that facial recognition systems are being used in China to identify people from the Uighur ethnic minority.

PopID's John Miller says he's in talks with the main card payment processing companies. They are said to see facial recognition payment as a way of bypassing mobile phone apps such as Apple Pay and Google Pay.

"They don't want to be dependent on the phone, because Apple is one company that can threaten them," he says. "So the idea of moving the payment system straight from the card to the face is very appealing to them."

Yet Mr Miller admits that facial recognition payment is an idea that some will never accept. "There's a segment of the population that's never going to adopt it, no matter how much logic you go through about how it compares to the phone. Because for them it's just psychological."

## **Putin Gets It: Tech Giants Are Becoming Competitors To Nation-States**

*dailymail.co.uk*

Vladimir Putin today sounded a warning about the influence of global tech giants which he said were 'competing' with national governments, after Russia told internet firms to take down posts that had fueled Alexei Navalny-inspired protests.

Putin told the virtual Davos summit that tech companies were 'not just economic giants... in some areas they are already de facto competing with the state'.

'We just saw it all in the United States,' he added, referring to the Capitol riot which led to the then-president being banned from Twitter - a move which has caused disquiet in several European countries.

Putin's comments come as Russia ramps up pressure on the activities of foreign tech giants, which are not subject to the same state censorship as most media outlets.

Moscow earlier this week accused US tech platforms of interfering in Russia's internal affairs during the anti-government protests egged on by Navalny.

Ahead of the Navalny rallies, Russia's media watchdog Roskomnadzor ordered several online platforms, including YouTube and Instagram, to delete posts by users calling for protesters to attend demonstrations.

The chairman of the Russian parliament's foreign interference committee, Vasily Piskaryov, said today that the head of TikTok's Russian branch had been invited in for a conversation.

Piskaryov was quoted by the TASS news agency as saying that 'questions had piled up' about the China-based video-sharing service.

In recent months, TikTok has emerged as a popular platform for young Russians to express their political views.

Hashtags dedicated to Navalny have been trending on TikTok, garnering more than 1.5 billion views, after the anti-corruption campaigner was jailed on his return to Russia from Germany.

Putin said today it was unclear where the line is between a 'successful global business' and 'attempts to crudely, at their own discretion, control society'.

His comments echo those of European leaders including Angela Merkel who voiced concern about Trump's Twitter ban and the power it gave to US tech giants.

Trump's Twitter account was permanently suspended earlier this month after he caused the riot at the Capitol and continued to use Twitter to spread his spurious claims that the 2020 election was rigged against him.

Merkel's spokesman said she viewed Trump's ban as 'problematic', saying that freedom of opinion was a 'fundamental right of elementary importance'.

'This fundamental right can be interfered with, but through the law and within the framework defined by the legislature, not according to the decision of the management of social media platforms,' her spokesman said.

EU governments have frequently clashed with US internet giants whom they accuse of holding too much power.

Poland recently moved to curb the power of Facebook and Twitter by drawing up plans for a 'freedom of speech council' which could overrule their decisions.

Social media sites would only be allowed to ban users for breaking Polish law under the plans unveiled by Warsaw earlier this month.

## UN Demand To Leaders: Declare A ‘State Of Climate Emergency’

Every world leader must immediately declare a “state of climate emergency” or face “catastrophic” results, U.N. chief Antonio Guterres warned Saturday.

Speaking at the opening of the Climate Ambition summit, held online to mark five years since the Paris Agreement, the Portuguese socialist warned nations’ current commitments were “far from enough” and were plainly unacceptable to the globalist body.

Around 70 heads of state and government took part in the meeting, which was organised by the UK, U.N. and France. They outlined broad new pledges and commitments to curb carbon but gave very little – if any – detail as to how that would be achieved.

“If we don’t change course, we may be headed for a catastrophic temperature rise of more than 3.0 degrees this century,” Guterres said.

Guterres said G20 nations were spending 50 percent more in their coronavirus rescue packages on sectors linked to fossil fuels than to low-carbon energy.

“This is unacceptable. We cannot use these resources to lock in policies that burden future generations with a mountain of debt on a broken planet,” he said via video-link, returning to a theme he expressed in the first week of December:

Guterres urged countries that had already announced net-zero targets to make good on their promises and to accelerate emissions cuts in line with the science.

“Every country, city, financial institution and company needs to adopt plans to reach net zero emissions by 2050 — and start executing them now, including by providing clear short-term targets,” he added.

One area that yielded little progress at the meeting was the question of finance. Rich countries had promised to mobilise \$100bn a year from 2020 under the Paris Agreement – but the commitments on cash have largely been ignored.

Guterres has already said he awaits Joe Biden in the White House to provide U.S. taxpayer funds to remedy that cash shortfall.

Saturday’s warning of impending climate doom came just over a week after Guterres issued a similar forecast, as Breitbart News reported.

On that occasion he said nature is determined to destroy humanity through flood, famine, fire, and pestilence, prophesizing the time has come for us to repent and mend our ways through a great climate and economic reset.

*Breitbart*